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## THE FAR EASTERN CRISIS.

BY ARCHIBALD R. COLQUHOUN.

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IN order to appreciate the commotion in Eastern Asia, which is in various ways agitating the whole world, it is essential to bear in mind that it is the product of two predominant factors, to which all collateral agencies are subordinate and accidental. It is no new problem which has been suddenly sprung upon the world, but only the *dénouement* of one which has been anticipated for fifty years and more. Nor is there any lack of prophetic record buried in government archives, in old periodicals and in shelved books. If there has been a slackening of categorical forecasts in the last few decades, it is simply because the voice grows weary of crying in the wilderness.

The two generative factors in the Far Eastern development to which we refer are, of course, Russia and China, which possess between them, in an altogether peculiar degree, the procreative properties which evolve great events. Each is, in many essential respects, the complement of the other. In bulk they are approximately well matched; in territorial contiguity they are joined by 3,000 miles of common frontier. These primary physical conditions admit of the freest interaction of their correlative forces. Russia possesses the vigor of youth, and is constantly and preternaturally aggressive. China is decadent, paralyzed and fatalistically passive. These are ominous contrasts, but they by no

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means exhaust the catalogue. China is a rich possession. Russia is comparatively poor; her civilization is primitive; she has not reached her full stature, and she is confident in her own power to dominate and appropriate the resources of her gigantic but inorganic neighbor. Given the juxtaposition of two such human agglomerations, might it not be said that Nature herself was working for their fusion? The temptation to intermingle is, in fact, irresistible. As the barbarians looked down on degenerate Rome, so do the modern Goths regard with wistful eye and watering mouth the defenseless sheepfolds of the Chinese. China lies like a vast terrestrial depression with a body of water pent up alongside of it; and therein lies the essence of the Far Eastern question.

No doubt the active stage of this chronic question which has recently startled the world was hurried on by the aggressive proceedings of third parties. Japan it was who first disturbed the equilibrium, and brought on an acute phase of the malady. The subsequent action of Germany, renewing the disturbance before it had had time to subside, created a fresh eruption. Both these inroads, lawless and unprovoked as they must be considered, were made because of the helplessness of China, and whatever plea of political justification may be claimed for either of them hangs upon the hypothesis that they were only anticipations of the aggressive action of Russia. It was the calculated movements of that power and the known impotence of China that determined, and will continue to influence, the proceedings of the other powers.

Before either Germany or Japan had been called into being as world powers, the Far Eastern problem which occupied studious observers was substantially the same as it is to-day. The forecasts of two serious students of contemporary history published between forty and fifty years ago have recently been cited in the English press. The authors happened to be both British Consuls in China, Sir Rutherford Alcock and Mr. Taylor Meadows, men who were too far in advance of their own generation to attract the notice they deserved. The two men had little in common, and they arrived at their one conclusion independently and by somewhat different roads.

Their prognosis was singularly confirmed by another equally good authority, also in advance of his time. This was the late

Edward Cunningham,\* head of the leading American firm in China, a gentleman distinguished for the catholicity of his views, no less in the conduct of ordinary business than in matters of interest to the community of which he formed a part. It is deserving of mention that it was Mr. Cunningham, in his capacity of chairman of the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce, who organized and raised the funds for those journeys of scientific exploration undertaken by Baron F. von Richthofen in 1870, which have shed so much light on the material condition of the Chinese Empire. For these explorations have supplied the data for all geological, mineralogical and strategic speculations about China on which the discussions of the present day are founded. It must be conceded that the man who so clearly grasped the prospective value of such discoveries as to be willing to pay for them "cash in advance" was no mean authority on the political evolution of the section of the world with which he was personally acquainted. What Mr. Cunningham thought of the relations between Russia and China in 1869 was lucidly set forth in a memorial which he presented to the United States representative, on the subject of a revision of the Chinese treaty which was then under consideration.

"As for a policy of 'generosity' as affecting the destinies of the Empire in the interests of the people, one smiles either with contempt at the credulity, or admiration at the audacity, of such an exponent of their principles. These views of the progressive tendency of the Chinese rulers of to-day are, of course, asserted in the interest of these rulers, as, if foreign nations could be brought to believe them, they would leave the Chinese to develop in their own way. There being in truth no will, there would be no way; but still, as regards the rulers alone, they would be relieved from pressure and so gain their immediate object.

"Whether they would gain ultimately depends upon the disposition of Russia. If China stood isolated in the world, the forbearance of all might be an advantage. Shouldered as she is by so powerful and aggressive a neighbor, it may be that the only effective protection for the present dynasty is in the intimacy with the other western powers.

"If it can be made to appear that the Russians have the will and the power to occupy China, it will be granted that there is at least a strong likelihood of that great event coming to pass. As to the will there is no proof, of course. One can judge by analogy. They have extended themselves in Asia wherever they have had an opportunity, and they have recently conquered and annexed the Kingdom of Bokhara at great cost, completing the extension of their dominions in that quarter to the borders of British India, a boundary which they must accept as final in that direction. The difficulties in that enterprise were greater, and the advantages not to be

\* Mr. Cunningham met his death, at the hands of an Italian poacher, within his own grounds, near Milton, Mass., in 1889.

mentioned, as compared to those to be incurred or gained in the acquisition of China. In the actual direction of this empire they have taken and occupied with forts within a few years the great tract of country lying between the Amoor and the present frontier, without any advantage in the region itself to attract them, and apparently only for the object of reaching nearer to China proper. They obtained a valuable port upon the coast, but that they could have had without the costly annexation of so great a territory.

"They have more young men learning the Chinese language, in one way or another, than all the other Westerns together, and they push their traders into the country with a pertinacity quite uncalled for by the exigencies of their trade.

"Finally, there lies before them a prize unparalleled in the history of the world. A nation of, at least, 200,000,000 of industrious, energetic and ingenious people, ripe for conquest, and capable, when conquered, of giving inexhaustible supplies of excellent soldiers and sailors; a nation poor, indeed, in resources, at present, but capable of a miraculous resurrection under an energetic rule. A country full of natural wealth, with an immense area of fertile soil already under cultivation; with a system of navigable rivers unsurpassed in the world; a coast abounding in fine harbors, and commanding this side of the Pacific; a dominion reaching to the tropics and including in its wide embrace every climate and almost every valuable production of the earth.

"It is impossible that, with their antecedents, their settled policy for centuries, the Russians should fail in desire for such a prize as this. As for the power, unless succored by other Western nations, the country would lie defenceless before the assault of 50,000 men led by a general skilled in modern war. Such succor, if it came at all, would probably come too late. By occupying the western and northwestern provinces under one pretext or another, and with the declaration that it was provisional and temporary, they could finally reach the coast and have possession of the main strategical points, with 200,000 or 300,000 Chinese soldiers under arms, and in effective condition, before any European power would have concluded to intervene. Their conclusions then would be uninteresting.

"In view of this greatest of hazards, it would seem to be the natural policy of the government to cultivate as close relations with other Western people as possible; to introduce them into the country; to accept their inventions and improvements; to obtain foreign arms and equipments; to train an army to the European standard of efficiency and under European officers. These are the steps which would be pressed on the Chinese authorities by their well-wishers, and sedulously followed up, if they wish them to maintain even their present position.

"It may be, however, that with great interests of humanity, foreign representatives may not have the prosperity of the present dynasty and government really at heart. Of this I do not pretend to judge. They may feel that nothing will elevate the Chinese people and place the country fairly in the path of progress and reform, but the government of a Western power. It does, indeed, seem impossible that any real good can come from the selfish and apathetic race of rulers that now misgovern the country, and in the interests of the millions who suffer from their incapacity or perversity, foreign powers are perhaps bound to withhold advice or suggestion that may delay the hour of deliverance. If such is the case, no course seems so wise as to leave them as much as possible to such seclusion as they can keep, and to their present narrow policy. With no Western influence but Russia in the interior, and no advisers but their antiquated maxims, they

will drop the easier prey into the lap of their vigorous neighbors—a friend or enemy, as he chose to take the part, and as circumstances recommend.

“Whether Russia will do good or evil to the world at large when she has an army of 2,000,000 on the Pacific, and a revenue to match, is a further point for consideration, but much beyond my province to discuss. I only express my conviction that such a course of things is not only possible but likely, if the Chinese inclination to resist progress and to hold Western nations at arms’ length is allowed to control events.”

And now within thirty years we see the almost literal fulfillment of this prediction.

A short reference to the occasion of Mr. Cunningham’s memorial will help to elucidate the whole Chinese question as it stood then and as it stands now. The Treaties of Tientsin, concluded in 1858, contained a proviso that their terms might be revised in the Tariff and Commercial Articles, at the instance of either party, at the end of ten years. The British Treaty, being the first in importance, was in process of revision, for which great preparations were made during 1867 and 1868. These preparations took, partly, the form of memorials from the various mercantile bodies dotted along the coast and rivers of China. But the terms of the Chinese Treaties with all the Western powers were such as to render it virtually impossible to revise one without revising all, because of the “most favored nation” clause, which entitled each power to claim whatever might be granted to any other. The obvious effect of this proviso was to vest the power of veto in the smallest state that had made a treaty with China. Consequently, the British negotiation necessarily assumed a cosmopolitan character, the representatives of other powers being kept informed, point by point, as progress was made, as well as being frequently consulted in advance. Hence, there was nothing out of the way in an individual American merchant’s communicating his views to his own Minister for the use of the British Negotiator, and it came about quite naturally that Mr. Cunningham’s Memorial formed part of the voluminous record of the negotiations archived in the State Department and in the Foreign Office.

The revision of the treaties at that time hinged upon one fundamental question, which had been seriously pondered by the British Government, with the result that a mature decision had been arrived at respecting it. The true bearing of that question is more clearly perceptible now than it was thirty years ago—

for it has not really altered, but remains essentially the same question. It was simply whether pressure should be applied to the Chinese government, either to secure fulfilment of existing treaties or to induce reasonable concessions in the revision of them. Up to that time, nothing had ever been obtained from China without pressure, and the general consensus of opinion was that nothing ever would be obtained without it, not even redress for outrages and injuries. Pressure had always succeeded; persuasion never. Lord Elgin had left it on record that the Chinese yield nothing to reason, everything to fear; and the drama which has been played in Peking during the year 1898 has afforded daily accumulating proof of the truth of that famous dictum.

It was morally certain, therefore, that no revision of treaty—except in a retrograde sense—would be effected by mere argument. It was with this knowledge that the British government entered on the revision campaign. The Chinese, on their part, also fully realized the conditions under which they entered on diplomatic negotiations which they could not openly decline, and, a very unusual thing for them, they made preparations for it, whether on their own initiative or on the prompting of their foreign advisers may remain an open question, though the form and manner of the defensive preparation might be safely assigned to a foreign origin. But, however that may be, at an early stage of the revision proceedings, the Chinese government resolved to send an envoy to Europe and the United States, for the purpose of persuading the treaty powers that the case was precisely the reverse of that stated by Lord Elgin. The envoy was, in fact, to inform the governments of the West that the Chinese would yield nothing to fear, but everything to reason! The agent appointed, or, rather, the spokesman of the two Chinese envoys who formed the mission, was the Hon. Anson Burlingame, at that time Minister of the United States to China. He sailed from China to San Francisco in 1868, and thence proceeded to Washington. He was completely successful, and induced the United States government to make a kind of convention with him which practically consisted of two provisions; one, that the United States would under no circumstances apply pressure to China; the other, that China would employ Americans to build their railways. Mr. Burlingame proceeded next to London, and

converted Lord Clarendon to the same passive policy toward China, obtaining from him a similar self-denying declaration to that which had been given by the Secretary of State in Washington.

The effect of these gratuitous declarations on the negotiations in Peking was marked and instantaneous. The hope of any liberal extension of the treaties was extinguished. The British Minister told his government so in plainer terms than are altogether usual between servant and master. "If it was difficult," wrote Sir Rutherford Alcock, "to negotiate for large concessions before the assurance authoritatively given by your lordship's communication to Mr. Burlingame, \* \* \* it is now out of the question to hope for more than has already been conceded. \* \* \* Strong in the assurance of two of the great treaty powers, \* \* \* it is quite certain that no further progress can be made at present." In other words, "you have stultified your agent, frustrated his efforts and given away the interests of the country." The position was at last recognized by Lord Clarendon himself, who, in the autumn of 1869, wished to abandon the negotiations over which two years' labor had been expended, in the hope that, when the time came for other powers to revise their treaties, Great Britain might retain an "open door" to profit by their negotiations.

The point of all this is that it is the policy dictated by Burlingame\* and accepted blindly by the cabinets of Washington and of London, which has been followed by the two countries for the last thirty years. And it is this particular policy which has brought China to the verge of anarchy and disruption. For it was a public renunciation of influence over the government. On the most favorable view that could be taken of it, it was a negative, sterile policy; devoid of authority; a law without a sanction. It was ruinous to China, because the withdrawal of the powers who had an interest in the preservation of that country left her open to the designs of those powers whose interests, or at least desires, lay in a contrary direction. While England has been fettered by her self-imposed total abstinence dogma, the destroyers of China have been free to revel in the prosecution of their schemes. Which is the actual position to-day.

\* It was Mr. Burlingame's plea for a policy of "generosity" that Mr. Cunningham alluded to in the opening sentence of the extract from his Memorial above cited.



The recovery of British influence is no child's play, for it means a reversal of the policy of a whole generation of statesmen. It is like gathering up water that has been spilt on the ground. This gives us, perhaps, the best key to the attitude of Her Majesty's government during the present year. It was in the position of a steamer in a fog, called on suddenly to reverse the engines, and running on to one obstacle while hurriedly avoiding another. Lord Salisbury himself pleaded this excuse at the Union Club, that his government had been taken aback by the rapid progress of events, and that it was no easy task for them at a moment's notice to discard the policy of Cobden, which had been the law of the land for half a century. There was something pathetic in the naïve confession that the dead hand of Cobden was still paralyzing the government of Great Britain, condemning it to conduct the business of the country on pious theories, which forbade it from taking any account of accomplished facts, and from adapting its course of action to the new developments of the world's life.

Of course, a wider sense is here given to the convenient term "Cobdenism," than the mere abolition of custom houses. The Cobdenism with which Lord Salisbury, Mr. Balfour and their supporters are so deeply infected extends over the whole field of national economics, and it has a serious meaning for all democratic countries. The events which are transpiring in distant parts of the world are putting popular government on its trial. England is in fact feeling the strain of a new conflict, which will shortly be felt in a less, though constantly increasing, degree in the United States also. So long as the interests of a nation are kept within a ring-fence, no device of man could be more conducive to the happiness and prosperity of a community than government by the people. "What favor can we show you?" said Sir Robert Peel to the merchants of London. "Let us alone," was the city's manly response. The legislation of England during the present century has been a continuous demolition of the barriers which checked the free action of the people; and it is not to be doubted that, under the perfect liberty thus accorded to them, the national prosperity has made remarkable strides. Industrial and commercial progress in the United States has, of course, from the nature of the case, been vastly more rapid, and that in spite of sundry self-imposed re-

straints on trade from which the British people are free. The system that conduces so greatly to individual enterprise and wealth is no less conducive to the collective good of society at large. Cobdenism, if we may continue to use this convenient term, besides being faultless in theory, is also triumphant in practice, so long as no disturbing element intervenes.

Where the scheme fails is in the fact that, on the great chess-board of the world's trade and politics, disturbing elements do and must intervene, in this case turning a domestic success into a foreign failure. Cosmic evolution itself has brought about conditions wholly unforeseen by Cobden, and still unrecognized by his disciples. Industrial and commercial competition have entered on a new phase. The isolated efforts of innumerable individuals are now opposed by compact forces marshalled by powerful governments. In their struggles with such combinations, traders and manufacturers who go a-warfare on their own charges must expect to be worsted. Adventurers, who enter the field with the whole machinery and resources of their national governments not only at their back, but in the van of their enterprises, possess advantages such as an organized army would possess against a host of volunteers. The full disclosure of the new species of international competition has been reserved for this present year, and the theatre of the discovery has been that great unexploited field of commerce, China. There we have seen, in a variety of aspects, the victory of action over inaction, and we have seen the superiority, in certain spheres of competition, of governments which lead their people, over people who lead their governments. While the rulers of Russia, Germany, France, and even Belgium, have been heading national crusades of productive enterprise in China, the governments of Great Britain and the United States have held aloof, and allowed rights and claims to be established to their perpetual exclusion and detriment. The British government has had nothing to oppose to these aggressive movements but Cobdenic maxims treated as if they were axioms of geometry, such as the "open door," "equality of opportunity," and so forth, which were never more than empty phrases, the survival of a state of things that had passed away. Ministers have again and again defended their inaction by pleading the novelty of the situation and the absence of precedents. The principle of non-interference with industry and

commerce, and of leaving everything to individual initiative, no doubt fits like a glove the theory of popular government; and the principle of *laissez aller*, in relation to other nations, is one which lends itself easily to academic defence, while offering no offence to abstract morality. The only objection to these principles is that they do not harmonize with the facts of national life.

In this mercantile world in which we live everything has to be paid for, and government by the people for the people forms no exception to the rule. Priceless as are its benefits, a price has still to be paid for them, and part of the price is incoherence, slowness of collective action, vacillation and ignorance in dealing with international affairs. The most prosperous countries are, naturally, those in which the citizens have no leisure for public questions which lie remote from their daily life, and who are only too content to resign their international interests to the governments of their choice. Hence, a breach of continuity in the management of affairs, the government waiting for the people and the people for the government. Thus vital national interests fall between two stools. This lapse of responsibility is easily traced in Great Britain, where the initiative, in former times exercised by government, has been step by step surrendered, as the tide of pure democracy has risen, so that now, when an emergency arises, there is no one ready or competent to deal with it. The state then is in the condition of an emigrant ship in a hurricane, left to the helpless devices of the passengers. The United States is in a somewhat similar predicament, with this difference, that, their interests being mostly at home, they have not as yet suffered visible injury for the neglect of their concerns abroad.

Observe now in what a different position such countries as Russia and Germany stand, whose governments hold in leash the national forces, military, diplomatic and political, in readiness to strike at a moment's notice, with no popular voice or even national impulse to wait for. Republican France, even, enjoys a freedom of action scarcely inferior to her autocratic neighbor, for the people expect no consideration in foreign or colonial enterprises, which are consequently left to the discretion of the executive government and to the initiative of official adventurers. When, therefore, the Far Eastern question was opened by the

Japanese war, these powers promptly cleared for action, while England remained wrapt like a mummy in the cerements of a worn-out policy, unable to move hand or foot to safeguard her interests—actual or prospective. The fetish of non-interference in China had no chance against the energy of powers who were inspired by a passion for aggression. Under the sway of this passion, China is being carved up like a sirloin of beef, as if there were no vitality in her. The ambition of Russia soars far above the mere military occupation of Manchuria or of the provinces of Northern China. She makes straight for the brain centre of the empire, paralyzing its functions. She is loosening the keystone of the arch, in order to find her account in the *débris* of the structure. The process of disruption is in full action. In view of this, France, Germany and Japan are in haste to secure as large as possible a share of what they consider to be a crumbling building, before the northern Colossus engulfs the whole.

But none of these powers has paused to consider what the disruption of a polity embracing 300,000,000 of Asiatics really means; for, even in the cynical and un-Christian epoch in which we live, only professed anarchists would be so anti-human as to lend a hand to accelerate such a calamity. In their greed for gain, however, the spectacle of a helpless nation and an effete government is too strong for moral restraint. We know something of what anarchy in China means, for we had experience of it some forty years ago, when hundreds of its cities were converted into cover for wild beasts, and tens of millions of lives were destroyed without cause. The commercial nations have the strongest interest in preventing the recurrence of such colossal devastation. Putting their motives on the very lowest and, therefore, the more lasting grounds, a depopulated country is of no use to the trader. On the other hand, China kept on her legs is a living mine of wealth to all those nations who are interested in the prosecution of honest trade.

The commercial nations, *par excellence*, are the Anglo-Teutonic, whose interest, in spite of an occasional freak of hot-blooded Kaisers, or the like, is not to break up old "China," but rather, if possible, to rivet the cracks in it. By the introduction of such improvements as railways, steamboats, mining and manufactories, by the infusion of the Western spirit as a new nervous force into the country, and of Western principles

of action, the resources of China, in men and material, would be rendered capable of providing fertile employment for white men for centuries to come. This is the great undeveloped estate which the present generation of Anglo-Saxons have to leave to their ever-increasing offspring, an inheritance richer far than all the prairies and all the gold mines in the world, because crowned with a wealth of humanity of the most efficient quality, an enormous hive of industry only needing direction, and with capacities for consumption commensurate with their unrivalled powers of production. Had the British and American people been sufficiently alive to the value of this prize, when China was thrown into the crucible in 1894, they would have insisted on their governments safeguarding those precious interests, and not permitting the Chinese Empire to be sequestered at the hands of the despotic and military states of Europe. What has been done cannot be undone, but the rapid progress already made in disintegration furnishes an imperative reason for conserving what is left. The practical question is, how is this to be done?

China is in the condition of an invalid whose life can only be saved by transfusion of healthy blood. The system has to be cautiously and carefully revived, not by violence, but by tact and patience. A new order has to be evolved out of the present chaos, under which the prosperity of the nation may advance *pari passu* with the legitimate interests of the foreign peoples who seek their fortune in the country. The desideratum cannot be more intelligibly indicated than by saying that it is foreign capital and foreign enterprise that are needed to preserve and to fertilize this valuable field of commerce. China wants her communications to be opened up, her industries organized, her hidden wealth brought to the surface, her natural products utilized. And as, according to the traditional order of procedure of the English-speaking races, as well as of their Teutonic and Scandinavian kinsmen, the enterprise of the people precedes and draws after it the protection of their governments, it follows that the infiltration of capital and skilled direction into China is the proper lever by which the governments of Great Britain and the United States may be moved to interest themselves actively in the welfare of that country. Only by such a policy can the predatory powers be kept from ravaging the country and precipitating anarchy and red ruin among the largest pop-

ulation on the face of the earth. Every line of railway, therefore, every steam factory, every hole dug in the ground in the interior of the Chinese continent, under either British or American auspices, is a solid gain to the whole commercial world. It is "effective occupation" of the genuine kind, the only kind of occupation that will save the territory from being staked off into exclusive areas, that will keep the door open for the free intercourse of all nations. Consequently, the concession of a railway between Canton and Hankow to an American syndicate is an event of happiest augury, just as every step taken toward connecting Western China with British India contributes to the establishment of free intercourse for all. Such concrete material interests lie at the root of national policy, and constitute the surest means of compelling the attention of our governments to the course of events in China. From whichever side we regard them, these are conservative as well as progressive measures; like mercy, twice blest, benefiting the people of China by opening out fruitful channels for their labor, while at the same time affording productive fields for the creative energy of the West.

Far Eastern affairs have never loomed large before the people of the United States, for the simple reason that their business connections there were by comparison infinitesimal and practically stagnant. A sympathetic interest in Japan was, indeed, aroused on the opening of the Island Empire through the instrumentality of an American naval squadron and a capable diplomatist, and a fair amount of genuine business has sprung up between the two countries. But still the æsthetic has prevailed over the commercial relation with Japan, while in China American diplomacy has been mainly occupied in damming back the flood of Chinese immigrants which was supposed to be threatening the interests of white labor. But a vast change has come over the scene during the last six months, and never was it made clearer that a nation's course is marked out for it by circumstances often unforeseen, than in the revolution which the events of this year have made in some of the fundamental dogmas of American policy. May we not say, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will," when we see the United States, by the necessary sequence of her own acts, forced into the position of an oceanic and an Asiatic power? The course marked out for her by philosophical students of the map of the world, to which she

seemed indifferent if not coldly averse, has been suddenly forced on her by the inexorable logic of events of her own making. Henceforth, her status as mistress of the Philippines and of the Sandwich Islands imposes on her the necessity of taking a hand in the game that is to be played in the Western Pacific. Fortunate that the question was not delayed until the gates of China were closed and the resources of that empire parcelled out among the anti-commercial nations ! The Pacific Ocean acquired a new significance for the United States when the Spanish war broke out and while the battleship "Oregon" was rounding Cape Horn. That was an object lesson which came home to the least imaginative. It doomed the old ocean thoroughfare. It brought the Isthmian Canal within the range of practical politics, it gave a new turn to American speculation, widened the national outlook—in a word, it made the United States a world power *in posse*. Fortunate, we say, that all this happened before China had been disposed of (for without China the Philippines have no meaning), since it confers on the United States the dignity of a great mission as well as the opportunity for great national enlargement. China is a world necessity, and civilization cannot afford that she should become a mere carcass round which the vultures of the world shall gather.

ARCHIBALD R. COLQUHOUN.